

R E P O R T

FROM THE

C O M M I T T E E

APPOINTED TO INSPECT

The several Houses and other Buildings
immediately adjoining to *Westminster Hall*,
and the Two Houses of Parliament, and
the Offices thereto belonging.

(*July 22d, 1789.*)

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R E P O R T, &c.

The Committee appointed to inspect the several Houses and other Buildings immediately adjoining to Westminster Hall, and the Two Houses of Parliament, and the Offices thereto belonging, and to report to the House their Opinion, from Time to Time, in what Manner the same may be best secured from the Danger of Fire, and what Improvements it may be proper to make therein; and who were instructed to receive Plans for the said Improvements, and report the same to the House, together with Estimates of the Expence of carrying such several Plans into Execution;

HAVING taken into Consideration the Matter to them referred, did cause the Plans already made of the said Ground, and the present Buildings thereon, to be laid before them; and, upon Enquiry, finding that most of the said Buildings are at present in a decayed and ruinous State, and that great Part of them, from their Situation, and the Occupancy thereof, are in great Danger from Fire;

Your Committee caused to be made and laid before them a Ground Plan, upon a Scale distinguishing the Dimensions, from the North East Corner of the Gate leading into Westminster Hall to Westminster Bridge, and from thence in a Line with the River to Parliament Stairs, and all the Buildings in Old Palace
Yard,

Yard, home to the New Passage leading to the House of Commons, which includes all the Buildings on the East and South Sides of Westminster Hall.

Upon Perusal of the said Plans, your Committee could not avoid being struck with the Magnitude thereof, and of the National Consequence of the Offices and other Places at present existing for the Transaction of public Business, and the Preservation of our most valuable Records. Your Committee cannot help thinking, that some great and noble Plan ought to be adopted; conformable to which, public Buildings should be erected, not only substantial and convenient, but also of a Magnificence suitable to the Dignity of this Country. Your Committee therefore thought it expedient, as an additional Ground of their Proceeding, to apply to the most eminent Artists of this Kingdom for their Opinion upon the actual State of the present Buildings, previous to the Artists being desired to furnish your Committee with Plans and Estimates for the intended Alterations.

That the said Artists have accordingly attended your Committee; and, at their Request, having viewed the said Grounds and Buildings, have made the Report which is herunto annexed.

Your Committee feel it a Duty incumbent upon them, to submit to the Consideration of this House, That, in making the said Plans and Estimates, a considerable Expence will be incurred by them, for which your Committee think they ought to be indemnified; and therefore your Committee have come to the following Resolution:

R E S O L V E D,

THAT it is the Opinion of this Committee, That the Sum of £.2,000 will be necessary towards the procuring Plans to enable your Committee to form their Opinion in what Manner the said Buildings may be best secured from the Danger of Fire, and also what Improvements may be proper to make therein.

To

To the Honourable the Committee of the House of Commons, appointed to inspect the several Houses and other Buildings immediately adjoining to Westminster Hall, and the Two Houses of Parliament, and the Offices thereto belonging, &c. &c.

IN Obedience to your Resolution of the 17th Instant, that we should inspect all the Buildings of the House of Lords, the House of Commons, Office of Exchequer, Court of Exchequer, the different Offices belonging to the same, and the other Buildings contiguous to Westminster Hall, and to report our Opinion of the present State of the same, and their Security from Fire and other Accidents, we beg Leave to make the following Report, in which we are unanimous, after having inspected the same with Care and Attention.

The House of Lords, Princes Chamber, and Painted Chamber, are Buildings of great Antiquity, in many Parts defective, and have been altered and repaired so very much, from Time to Time, that, though they may stand many Years, are incapable of useful Repair and Improvement; and there are Cellars under the Whole, variously occupied, only One of which is secured by Arches from the Communication of Fire. All the Buildings East of the House of Lords are in so bad a State, that many of them are in immediate Danger of falling down, and are therefore unoccupied and shut up; and the others would cost more to repair than re-build them. The Building West of the House of Lords, containing the Entrance thereto, and the Staircase and Committee Room, is a substantial modern Building; and the other Buildings adjoining, comprising the Passages, Black Rod and Privy Seal Rooms, are in Part built with Timber, liable to rapid Decay, and Accidents from Fire; and the Remainder extremely old and ruinous.

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The House of Commons, though an ancient Building, has been so continually repaired, that it is in a State to remain a great many Years; but is so connected with the Auditor of the Exchequer's House and Offices, and surrounded by a great Number of other Buildings, applied to various Purposes, and in various Occupations, as to expose the Whole to a general Conflagration, should an accidental Fire happen in any One of them.

The Dwelling House in Cotton Garden, belonging to the Principal Clerk of the House of Commons, communicating therewith, erected within Thirty Years past, is defective in several Places, from the Insecurity of the Foundations.

The Buildings East of Westminster Hall, between it and the River, are, the Pell Office and Chambers over it in the East Tower, and the Offices of the Exchequer, contiguous and connected with the Hall, and situate between New Palace Yard and St. Stephen's Court; those of the Four Tellers are most inconveniently arranged, and liable to immediate Destruction in case of Fire, being placed in the upper Story, without any Walls of Division, or arched Floors; are separated only by Timber Partitions, surrounded by combustible Buildings, Stables, Coach Houses, Hay Lofts, Servants Lodging Rooms, and Kitchens; the Dutchy Court of Lancaster, a slight Building of One Room, and over it the Dutchy Chamber, with Garrets above; the Kitchen of the Clerk to the Deputy Usher of the Exchequer, a low Shed, between these Rooms and the Easternmost Tower, and immediately connected with them. The House inhabited by the Usher of the Exchequer, in New Palace Yard, Eastward of the Dutchy Court of Lancaster, has a Brick Front, and its Rear is entirely of Timber, Lathed and Plastered, forming Two Sides of a narrow Court, from which it receives Light, and which communicates with the Windows of the Tellers Offices, Cash Rooms, and of the Dutchy Court; and most of the Kitchen Offices belonging to the Deputy Usher and his Clerk are immediately under those Offices, and the small Wood Staircase in the Center of them, and leading thereto.

The Buildings on the East Side of New Palace Yard, from the King's Bridge or Water Gate, to the House in Possession of Mr. Roberts, Tenant to the Marquis of Buckingham, as a Teller of the Exchequer, contain the late Cofferer's Office, the Office of the Auditor of the Land Revenue, the Lottery Office,

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the Examiner's Office, the Tellers for the Payment of American Claims, the Pells American Office, the Exchequer Bill Book-binder's Office, the Office of the Auditor of the Principality of Wales, the Annuity Pell Office, the First and Second Annuity Offices, and the 14 per Cent. Annuity Office, which are principally constructed with Timber, Lath and Plastered, or Weather-boarded; in many Places propt up, and in others contiguous to low Sheds, equally combustible. The adjoining Building Southward is Mr. Roberts's House, which with the Garden occupies all the Space from St. Stephen's Court to the River, and is immediately connected with the last-mentioned Offices; it has been lately repaired, and some additional small Buildings erected thereto. The next House, adjoining Southward to the last-mentioned, belongs to Lord Viscount Bayham, as Teller of the Exchequer; the Buildings and Garden likewise extend to the Thames, and are at present unoccupied, being in a very dilapidated State.

On the West Side of St. Stephen's Court, against the East Wall of Westminster Hall, are the Coach Houses and Stables of the Auditor of the Exchequer, having Hay Lofts and Servants Lodging Rooms over them, which adjoin to and come close under the Windows of the Office and Cash Room of one of the Tellers. On the South of this Court is the Auditor of the Exchequer's House, extending Southward to the House of Commons, and under Part of it; the Garden extends to the River. The Buildings are substantial, and extend under Two of the Committee Rooms of the House of Commons.

The Court of Exchequer, and Exchequer Chamber, contiguous to, and connected with, Westminster Hall, are very old, but not in a State of actual Ruin. On the Ground Floor, under the Court of Exchequer, is the Custos Brevium of the Court of Common Pleas, and Treasurer's Office belonging; the Ceiling and Walls of them are lined with Deal, are insecure from Fire, and very damp. Adjoining Westward to these, and projecting into the Street, to the great Obstruction and imminent Danger of Persons and Carriages passing to and from the Houses of Parliament, is situated an old Brick Building, occupied on the Ground Floor by the Deputy Usher of the Court of Exchequer, most of his Rooms containing a Fire Place, and the Ceilings are flat and low; over these, on the One Pair of Stairs, is the King's Remembrancer's Office, and over that the Augmentation Office. We understand, that, so long ago as the passing of the Act of Parliament for building Westminster Bridge, a Clause was inserted,

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ferred, empowering the Commissioners under that Act to remove this Nuisance, the Roof of which is immediately connected with the Court of Exchequer. The Public Houses and Coffee Houses on the South Side of New Palace Yard immediately adjoin the Custos Brevium of the Court of Common Pleas, and are particularly dangerous, as they have several Chimneys and Coppers; the Roofs are under and close to the Windows of the Custos Brevium, and some of them covered with Sail Cloth pitched; the Smoke of One of the Chimneys is conveyed by a slight Tin Funnel, and, as well as the Flues, are near the Windows of Westminster Hall, of the Towers, and of the Court of Exchequer.

Next to Saint Margaret's Street, and adjoining Southward to the old Brick Building before-mentioned, is a Building of the same Kind, containing the Tally Office, being a Depository for the Tallies belonging to the Exchequer. Adjoining Southward thereto is the Coach House for the Judges, a slight Timber Building, covered with Tiles.

The Stone Building next Saint Margaret's Street, comprising Committee Rooms, and other Apartments occupied by Officers of the House of Commons, Custos Brevium of the Court of King's Bench, and the Exchequer Bill Office, is of recent Date, and very substantial. Behind that Building, and contiguous to Westminster Hall, are the Court of Common Pleas, Judges Chambers, and Record Office, which are in tolerable good Condition; to them are annexed sundry Excrescences, mostly of Timber, which should be removed, as they increase the Danger of Fire and its Communication.

The Court of Requests is in itself a secure substantial Building, but communicates with, and is surrounded on the South and West by, a Variety of Houses, which are private Property, Part of them Timber; which must very much endanger the Whole, as long as they remain.

We beg Leave to submit to this Honourable Committee, That, from the very circumstantial Detail we have entered into of the State of the various Parts of the Buildings which the Committee requested we might examine, it is almost superfluous and unnecessary to declare our unanimous Opinion, That the Hazard they have been, and still are, exposed to from Fire is so great, that we cannot help being astonished at their having so long and so happily escaped (with but One late and fortunate Exception)
from

from the most imminent Danger. Unprotected by Walls of either Brick or Stone, connected and joined together by Boarded or Lath and Plastered Partitions, with Iron Bars to defend the Windows of the most consequential Offices, which serve to attract the Lightning, to the Destruction of their valuable Contents; with Funnel and Chimnies running up in old decayed Piers, in the very Bosom of these combustible Materials, in many of which Fire from a neglected Chimney might consume the Whole, without the Possibility of bringing sufficient Water to extinguish the Flames, such Aid being hitherto overlooked, or deemed unnecessary, and not more than One Engine kept near the most essential Offices in this Kingdom.

All which is humbly submitted.

20th July 1789.

ROBT ADAM.
GEO. DANCE.
J. P. COCKERELL.
H^r HOLLAND.
JOHN YENN.
JOHN SOANE.
ROBT BROWNE.
THO^s TILDESLEY.
JOHN WOOLFE.
JOHN WOOLFE, Jun^r.
ROBT ADAM, for Rob^t Myles.
THO^s FULLING.
CHA^s ALEX^r CRAIG.
JAMES WYATT.